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ABSTRACT

Audiovisual aids can be helpful in language learning associated with education in a particular vocational field. While students in all fields must master the grammar of a language, the vocabulary needed may vary according to the vocation a student has chosen. Audiovisual aids can help a student preparing for a particular occupation. Visual aids can illustrate environment and situations for language use. Recordings of people on-the-job provide examples of dialect pronunciations and idiosyncratic or so-called careless speech. Through audiovisual aids, the student can obtain a good idea of the linguistic demands of a particular job or occupation through glimpses of the work or activity to which the language relates. (Author/VM)

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Audio-Visual Aids to the Learning of EFL for Vocational Purposes

W. R. Lee

But first, leaving vocational purposes aside for a few minutes, of what use are auditory and visual aids to the learning of foreign languages?

After all, they were taught and learnt before most of the audio-visual aids, in the contemporary meaning of the term, marketed their way onto the scene. There seems little doubt, however, that foreign--language teaching and learning have in some ways and in some places benefited considerably from their arrival, in spite of large-scale and pitiful misuse, much of it associated with the view, usually unexpressed, that 'aids' can to some extent do the teacher's job for him.

This view is not of course wholly without just_ification, since often, for example, the teacher's pronunciation of the foreign language, even when it is fairly good, can usefully be supplemented (to use a euphemistic word) by the example that recorded native speech of some type can provide, and can always be supplemented where it is a matter of exposing the learner - as perhaps at advanced level - to examples of other types or varieties of speech. An auditory aid of this kind - whether a recording or a broadcast - helps the teacher to improve his own spoken command, if he makes good use of the aid, and also replaces him to some extent in his model-providing aspect. Where there are no reasonably good speakers of the language, the only useful model will be that provided by aids. In such circumstances, which are far from rare, the aid does do the teacher's job for him, at least in so far as that job consists of the provision of a spoken model.

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Abuse lies in the excessive or indiscriminate use of aids, and what is excessive in one teaching environment is not necessarily so in another. This is particularly true of auditory aids. Where the teacher's English is poor, it seems plain that the provision of auditory aids can hardly be excessive, though it would be inappropriate if suited neither to his own immediate needs nor to those of his class. On the other hand, where a teacher's command of English - and, one must also add, grasp of effective teaching procedures - have reached a certain level of competence, there is a regrettable imbalance if auditory aids take up a lot of the time he might otherwise spend using the foreign language personally and as an evident means of communication with his class, and adjusting the use minute by minute to the learners' response and to what happens during the lesson-period. Such a teacher would wish to use auditory aids as a stimulus or starting-point for oral activity (or at advanced level perhaps to illustrate other styles of speech), but otherwise mainly outside the classroom time, as a means of recalling or recapitulating what has been spoken there or as one means of enabling pupils who have been absent to catch up. But alas, in very many places, the apparatus is so valuable that it can only be handled under the instructor's eye, and there is no out-of-class opportunity for learners to make use of the recordings available. The solution in a big school is to make the out-of-class supervision of the use of recordings the librarian's business, or to bring it within the purview of a semi-voluntary English Club. In a small school, there is no solution unless the teacher or somebody else is able to give extra time.

Abuse comes also from lack of discrimination, from mistaking the nature of the help which an auditory aid can provide. The aid is not simply the apparatus, but

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the apparatus and the material taken together; and much of the existing recorded material was never devised to encourage meaningful and communicative use of the foreign language, but only to facilitate the repetition which is essential to mastery of certain phonological and grammatical features. I have in mind the mass of pronunciation drills and structure drills of various sorts. This kind of aid caters only for the habit-forming aspect of foreign-language teaching. To expect it to do more, and to help much with the language-teacher's central task - which is less to give familiarity with the forms of the language than to teach the learners in what circumstances to use the forms and with what effect - in other words, to teach the art of communication in the particular language - is to expect from it something it cannot give; and misuse of the aid is the inevitable consequence. One has therefore to ask of every aid 'What can it do, where is its place, how much time - allowing for other things that have to be done - should it be given?'

Excessive or undiscriminating use may also be made of visual aids. Pictures can be helpful in language teaching if they supply or suggest something - objects, people, actions, events, situations - with which the vocabulary and syntax can be associated, and associated in such a way that the use and meaning of the item of language to be taught is made obvious. It is no good trying to teach a language as if it were a disembodied thing, not closely connected with experience. It is a basic error to marshall and present in the language--lesson nothing but pieces of language, and not some kind of experience as well, not simply for the sake of variety

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and interest but also to help forge the links between experience and the linguistic forms, this being the language-teacher's principal task. Pictures help to supply that experience, and are of most value where the objects, activities, and situations they show cannot be found in the classroom. One cannot drive a car there or climb a mountain or be chased by a bull. Pictures - and here one includes simple chalkboard sketches - bring in the outside world. It is undiscriminating to use pictures of things and actions which can be brought into or can take place in the classroom, the height of absurdity being reached when a wall-picture of a classroom is used in the classroom itself, though it is not necessarily inappropriate in a reader which the pupils take home. There is excessive use if the visual aids, however good, are used so often that insufficient time is left for language-teaching exploitation of the classroom itself. It is a kind of stage or setting, where much can take place, especially if miming and acting are included. Fortunately this kind of activity, which serves language-teaching well, makes a strong appeal to children, and also to many adults, especially if these have been brought up on dramatisation when they were children. Up to a point the more things there are in a language-classroom the better, but at least there are the pupils and the desks and chairs and the chalkboard and it is wonderful how much can be done with no more elaborate resources: an array of prepositions, a variety of tense-uses, several ways of comparison, and many other common parts of the language can readily be brought to life.

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A full exploration of the common abuses of aids cannot be attempted here. Based on detailed observation of what is done with aids in particular circumstances, I suspect it would be a fascinating, and also perhaps a dismally illuminating, study. I am not of course suggesting that aids are rarely well used - on the contrary, I began by saying that language-teaching has undoubtedly benefited from their arrival. Nevertheless many of them languish in solitary confinement, the penalty for going on strike. I strongly suspect that a world survey of school apparatus would reveal that for long periods the majority of tape recorders are out of action and that at any given moment there are far more out of work through breakdown than healthily employed.

Part of the trouble is that the language-teachers have never adopted a reasonable attitude towards the technical wizards. I have an immense confidence in the technical wizards myself, and believe them capable of producing almost anything, so long as one carefully explains what is wanted. They go away and think and then produce the technical means: one saw this during the last war. But the trouble is that language-teachers do not explain what they want, because they have never made up their minds. They look at the apparatus which exists and ask 'How can we make the best use of this for language-teaching?' But much of the apparatus (the film-projector, the tape recorder, the gramophone) has been primarily developed for other purposes, and not for the teaching of languages. We need to decide, in the light of what is known about the nature of foreign-language learning and teaching, what the technicians should be asked to ~~provide~~ invent. The initiative,

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as far as apparatus is concerned, has so far come mainly from the technical and sales sides and not mainly from the pedagogical side.

But this is possibly a digression. Having touched one some of the abuses, let us now pass on to look at the credit side. Languages were learned before some of the aids had even been heard of; nevertheless ~~but~~ in several ways aids can be helpful. In what ways?

Some of the answer has already been given in the course of complaint. Auditory aids can supply a model of speech - and speech includes grammatical as well as phonological features - which influences both the teacher and the pupils. The situational factor need not be wholly missing. I have in mind not only short examples but also long stretches of spoken language, the circumstances and occasion of which can be suggested by sound effects (traffic, birdsong, church bells, machinery, knocking at a door), by the words themselves ('Here we are! Now, d'you see that little green door on the left?'), or by what the listener is told about the situation beforehand ('This is a quarrel between several people about their places in a queue') or afterwards ('You've been listening to a discussion between two door-to-door salesmen about the kind of people they meet'). But an auditory aid can supply much more than a model for imitation; it can supply an environment of speech in which the learner is caught up; it does this, for example, when the recorded material stops to challenge or question him, as some of the BBC language-teaching films do. This at least helps to prevent him from sinking into a torpor or doing nothing but follow the

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narrative thread. This aspect of the use of auditory aids needs to be developed through further experiment. An extreme example is the short film the sound track of which has been 'turned off', leaving the language-learner to supply or re-supply dialogue or comment as the silent but visible action unfolds. A less extreme example would be a character, seen or unseen, who supplies only one side of a conversation, possibly a series of denials or contradictions, leaving the learner free to invent provocative statements: or it might perhaps be easier the other way round.

Recordings made at widely spaced intervals may also reflect some aspects of a student's language--learning progress. Furthermore, the tape recorder offers a means of reflecting the learners' efforts, whether at dialogue-speaking or dramatisation or something else, back at him, and this is itself a stimulus. And all the auditory aids (tape recorder, gramophone, radio) can offer other voices than the teacher's familiar voice.

Visual aids (chalkboard sketches, the wall sheet, pictures in books, pictures, the moving flannelboard picture) and audio visual aids (the filmstrip with tape accompaniment, the film, the TV) are capable of providing a broader range of situations than can be found or contrived in the classroom itself. They are one essential means of ensuring that the language is not presented and practised as a disembodied thing, cut off from what it refers to. They can, of course, take us much further, by giving an impression of a whole range of settings where English is spoken as a native language. Auditory

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aids alone can contribute here, but not so much. Finally, any interesting picture can be a starting-point for the use of language, a stimulus, a source of ideas and feelings which struggle to be expressed. Moving pictures have the greatest capacity for involvement, for drawing the viewer in. I often wish that films shown in the classroom could be stopped now and then, at the teacher's will, so that for a few minutes an interesting part could be 'frozen', as in the fade-out of Match of the Week, the BBC sports programme: to be able to 'freeze' the picture and then re-animate it would bring the whole situation much more effectively under the language-teacher's control and heighten the value of the picture as an aid to language-learning.

As for the teaching of English for vocational purposes (the English of the engineering workshop, the hospital ward, the physics laboratory, the bank, the law court, the department store, the garage, the iron foundry), what are the purposes and who are the students to bear in mind. Firstly, let us not assume that vocational English is of no concern to the beginner. If the adult student of mining or medicine, of nursing or agriculture, decides that he or she wishes to learn English for vocational use alone, we cannot reasonably lay down that the English of the ~~particular~~ vocation should be excluded from the earliest lessons. It may be that the differences between the English of chemistry and physics, or of biology and agriculture, or of business procedure and accountancy have at times been exaggerated: but that is another point. It may further be true that the

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vocational language - special words and phrases, more favoured syntax - is best acquired as an addition to the common core of which everybody whatever his eventual fate and specialisation, needs to become possessed: that again is a different point. Faced with adult beginners whose interest in a particular vocation is keen, and whose wish to learn a foreign language arises wholly out of that interest, is it not reasonable, and perhaps necessary, to colour even the most elementary stages of the language course with the content and therefore the vocabulary of the vocation these students have on their minds? In the early stages, I would think, it is a matter of vocational lexis more than of vocational grammar, unless one adopt the phrasebook-maker's approach of plunging the student into a hotch-potch of phrases and sentences he will need to understand and use, relying upon his ability to memorise them and to produce them, as Pavlov's dogs produced saliva, whenever the occasion ~~is appropriate~~ arise. But whatever the ~~vocation~~ job or specialised ~~use~~ line, there is a body of grammar the use of which in communication has to be mastered by all; the vocabulary is to be varied, just as it is varied somewhat as between young and old learners, or learners in one part of the world and learners in a very different part of the world.

A teaching situation in which the young pupils have little or no idea of the use they will make of the foreign language after leaving school is probably much commoner. The teachers themselves may have some knowledge of the proportion of their school leavers who take up this occupation or that: what proportion

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will need English to work in travel agencies, on aircraft, in hospitals and laboratories, and so on. But this will be a matter of dry statistics, and will not tell them what Hans, ~~Kevin~~ Yvonne and ~~Costas~~ Mahomed will want to do. 'Everybody has the right to a basic education': I will not elaborate this principle here, as it no doubt deserves to be elaborated, but say merely that I fully accept it, and must add: 'Why exclude from the basic curriculum a foreign language?' This foreign-language will be non-vocational, since the pupils do not know what their vocation or job will be, or whether they will need a foreign language for it, or which of the language-skills (conversation, reading, etc.) they will need most if they do. The only reasonable and fair thing, therefore, is to give such learners an all-round basic course, which will serve as a foundation for any specialised courses with a vocational bias they may wish to undertake in later years, either after or shortly before they leave school.

Furthermore, there are the very large numbers of adults who pursue the learning of a foreign language at various levels, from elementary to advanced, for so-called cultural reasons or for the sake of interest, and not (or not primarily) for the sake of vocational advantage. Among them no doubt are dabblers and dilettanti, although by and large there seems no reason for regarding them with any less respect than those whose language studies are vocational. The crude notion, fortunately not widespread, that vocational education is in some way superior to non-vocational education and more deserving of financial aid is wholly to be deplored.

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Given a long period of foreign-language learning - during school years, for instance - and the att ainment of a fairly advanced standard, study of the language, for vocational ends will concentrate on lexis. If the study is shaky on the use of syntax particularly important in writings on the subject concerned, additional or remedial work will be needed there; but the technical words and expressions peculiar to the specialisation will form the bulk of the additional language-material to be mastered. These cannot be understood and absorbed except through an understanding of the subject-matter in which they are embedded, and the language-teacher, unless himself expert in the specialisation, will not be well qualified to teach their use.

It may be that the foreign-language equivalents of the vocational terms are to be found in good bilingual technical dictionaries. Undoubtedly, however, the best way of acquiring them is take up appropriate employment in the country in question. This is what many bank clerks do whose firms have branches in Britain, and similar opportunities are open, on a fairly large scale, in other branches of commerce, as well as in nursing and medicine.

Obviously it is not open to everybody to acquire specialised vocational language in this practical way; but auditory and visual aids can to some extent act as a substitute by taking us, as it were, inside the occupation. Films and still pictures showing at close quarters the detail of the work and of the processes, are one means to this end. Here the visual aid, as generally in language-teaching, shows an environment and situations for language use. Appropriate commentary may be available on tape. But

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tape can offer very much more, if recordings of those 'on the job' are obtainable. Thus a craftsman can be heard (and seen too, perhaps) explaining his techniques and materials, an inventor or a machine-minder his machine, a mechanic one or two of his repair jobs, a dentist one or two of his repair jobs: and all this not for general interest or the enlightenment of the non-specialist but for the interest and benefit, and especially for the linguistic benefit, of the fellow-specialist speaking a different mother tongue. It is not, of course, wholly a lexical matter since those concerned will not always be speakers of R.P. but will use the sounds and prosodic features of other dialects, while even R.P-speakers may not speak with the care and clarity to which the foreign learner is ~~habituated~~ accustomed. Again, here is something - namely, exposure to dialect pronunciations and to idiosyncratic or so-called careless speech - which normally belongs to an advanced stage of language-study. None the less the relative beginner, if faced with the immediate prospect of vocational work among native speakers of the language in a particular place, could be in dire need of familiarity with the style of pronunciation customary there. One remembers the Italian coalminers of twenty years ago, who found that few people in their immediate Yorkshire environment spoke the approximate R.P. which they had been taught, not that R.P. was useless to them. The European Economic Community in its social aspects is ~~to throw~~ throwing up similar problems.

The possibilities I have touched on, in referring to the ways in which audio-visual aids can promote the learning of a foreign language for vocational purposes, are forms of ~~dialect~~ direct help to the learner. Pictures and

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recordings, if they are numerous and apt enough, can obviously help to give him a good idea of the linguistic demands of a particular job or occupation, and the information is supplied, not out of context and in a relatively boring manner, but ~~closely~~ in close association with ~~an impression~~ glimpses of the work or activity to which the language relates. But one has in mind here not only the non-native language-learner who is going to work alongside users of the language, as a French bank-clerk works in an English bank or a German nurse in an English hospital, but also of course - and principally - those who need to discuss their specialisation with others, or to attend conferences (using English perhaps as a lingua franca), or simply to read specialised literature in English; for these too need the liveliest possible perception of the meaning of the special language in relation to the concepts and activities of their special field. Audio-visual aids can help to give the necessary depth.

Apart from the direct help, what about indirect? This is help offered to the teacher and textbook-writer and possibly to the advanced self-taught student. As far as the spoken form of language is concerned, large-scale and systematic observation and analysis depend on recording-devices. The tape-recorder is the handmaid of the lexical and syntactic speech frequency-count. What words, what structures, are of high occurrence in conversations and conferences on zoology, as distinct from those of high occurrence in zoological textbooks? What is the English of law courts (for the benefit of the law student from overseas) as compared with the English of books on law? Is medicine discussed in speech as it is in print? And so on. There is endless scope here for research with a practical application, and the help of recording

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apparatus is required to give it a firm basis. Results of this research can be used in the writing of textbooks and in the construction of other teaching aids such as tape-recordings themselves.

Even if in many places audio-visual aids are more honoured in the abuse than in the use, there can be little doubt of their ~~potential~~ value to the foreign-language teacher, including the teacher of English for vocational purposes, whether they help to provide a model, a stimulus, or an environment. They should be imaginatively developed in the service of vocational language-teaching.

— W.R. Lee